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THE ARCHANGELIC CENSORSHIP

BY WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

THERE was a great excitement in the Court of Heaven when the prayers and thanks began to come up. Angels and Archangels were flying about, and cherubs flitting hither and thither, messengers and seraphs getting their harps and shawms and cymbals ready for the grand concert to be given as soon as the divine response should be announced. Raphael had not been so much interested since he was commissioned to visit Adam in the Garden of Eden, and converse with him as "friend with friend" on the topics of the day with particular reference to the ideal of duty which he was to enforce upon our earliest forefather. Michael had never been so busy since that night when he headed an army corps of angels to intercept the Archfiend who had violated the neutral territory of Eden, and

. . . led his radiant files,
Dazzling the moon . . .

until he found the Enemy in the bridal bower, and ordered Ithuriel to develop his flank with his spear. Gabriel had his horn at his side and held himself ready to wind it at the first word from within, where the facts were all so severely censored that no syllable had yet escaped, to declare which supplication from the embattled earth was the most acceptable to the ear of the Heavenly Father.

The situation on our planet had perhaps never been more difficult or more embarrassing in the complexity and contrariety of the claims which moved its appeals to the Supreme Being. Not many months earlier two wretched young men in Servia had murdered a man and his wife in circumstances of peculiar atrocity. But the event might not have appealed so vividly if the husband had not been heir to the political ownership of a great empire, whose people had no more to say in the matter than if they had been so many

dumb animals. For this reason Austria, so grievously injured, demanded impossible reparation, and Servia refused. Both States moved their troops to the frontier; Russia promptly did the same, and Germany declared war against Russia, and logically attempted to march her troops through Belgium to attack France. Belgium would not consent and so became the first great battle-ground of a war which did not concern her except as a free and independent State. England felt bound to support the Belgian contention; she declared war on Germany and united with France. Montenegro and Herzegovina joined in the attack on Austria; Greece remained ready to mobilize against Turkey; Turkey prepared to support Germany. Italy was bound by treaty to Austria and Germany, but was withheld by her people's sympathy with France and England and Russia, and continued neutral till one side or the other should promise her Trieste and Trent.

This was the human situation when the orisons of all the different States began to ascend to the Throne of Grace urging a prior claim, each side, to the divine favor and blessing. France, indeed, was in a peculiar disability regarding her faith and the church which could best bring her appeals to bear; but the church, which is the Mother Church even of rebellious and disobedient children, could not wholly deny her influence to the Republic. With regard to Belgium she could feel no hesitation; and the Orthodox Church, which held the Mother Church schismatic, used as pious ceremonies of entreaty in behalf of the Russians. The Book of Common Prayer addressed the Deity with the same beautiful formula for all members of the English Church in Great Britain, Canada, Australasia, and India, and supplicated the good Lord for deliverance from battle, murder, and sudden death, while all the dissenting sects throughout the Empire, as well as the heathen within her gates, implored a benediction on her arms in whatever extemporaneous or idolatrous petition they were used to offer the God or the Fetish of their worship. There was, of course, an embarrassment in the case of the Turks, which the Archangels in charge felt keenly. The idolators could be easily managed; their gross and foolish offerings could be relegated at once to the waste-basket; but with the Mohammedans it was different. These were the worshipers of a divine person whom they called Allah, and whom they would

not suffer to be represented by any sort of graven image. To some effects and purposes they bowed in prayer to the same Power as the different varieties of Latin, Greek, Anglican, Lutheran, English Dissenting, and Wee Free Scotch Christians. It would not do to distinguish for or against the Turks because they were for Germany; the Egyptian Moslems who must be against the Kaiser were of an English affiliation and therefore of the Triple Entente, but had no better right to have their prayers counted.

In the mean time the prayers continued to accumulate in the outer courts, and it became a crying question what should be done about them. Practically those human beings steeped to the lips in the blood of their fellow-men, and kneeling on the festering heaps of those they had slain, had all been praying to the same God, the God of Pity, the God of Truth, the God of Righteousness and Love and Mercy. They came to their altars reeking with slaughter, their faces lurid with the smoke of powder and the flames of the peaceful cities and villages they had burned. They stank with the corruption of the dead whom they had seized a little respite from reciprocal slaughter to heap into the trenches they had tardily dug for them, and then covered with too little of their mother earth to hide them. Yet something must be done about their prayers for victory; these prayers could not all be turned down; they could not all be granted. The most embarrassing phase of the affair was their praying, friend and foe alike, to the same God, and claiming Him their champion with implicit belief in His devotion to their interests. This belief spread through the rank and file from their leaders, through their superior officers down from the fountain-head of the authority over them in their sovereign princes. The French, as Republicans, and as rather recalcitrant sons of Mother Church, did not so readily fall in with the devotional mood of the head of the State. In fact, their President is not yet known to have made any claim to the divine favor, such as came from the two Emperors allied against him; if he did the text of his prayer did not pass the censorship. The highly constitutionalized monarchy of Great Britain did not, apparently, regard it as good form to enter into competition with the devout rulers of Germany and Austria, who could have been met on their own ground only by the Czar of Russia, though at a great meeting in the Guildhall of the city the Archbishop

of Canterbury was present, together with the Prime Minister and the leader of his Majesty's opposition, "supporting their appeal in the name of his Master the Prince of Peace." Even the Czar did not boast any such intimacy with the designs of the Almighty as the two Kaisers, or at least no petition of his had got past the Archangels into print, though the commander of his forces at Lemberg announced his victory over the Austrians "with extreme joy and thanking God." No doubt, however, his petitions were among those which embarrassed the Archangels by that tone of confident assurance inseparable from the nature of an absolute prince; through the same fortuity of birth the Sultan also took Allah's favor for granted; though the Moslems of Egypt would have been bound, through their British allegiance, to pray for the *Entente*, while the Turks were praying for the *Dreibund*. There is no actual record of the Sultan's supplication, though, as it would have consisted largely of genuflections in the direction of Mecca, he might very well have vied with his brother-sovereigns, Christian Dogs as they were, and the fact not transpired.

The prayers of the two Kaisers were confided to mortals by wireless at the same time they were offered to Heaven, but even in this concert of imperial piety it appears that the share of the Holy Roman Emperor was small compared with that of the German Emperor. The good Francis Joseph does not directly address the Deity, as reported by wireless, but he telegraphs to the good Wilhelm: "God is with you. He will be with us also. I must sincerely congratulate you, dear friend, also the young hero, your dear son, the Crown Prince, as well as the incomparably brave German army." The tenor of this could not be mistaken by the Archangels, and it was probably transmitted as a species of cross-petition against any orison arriving at the moment from the parties to the *Entente*. As the eldest and dearest son of Mother Church the Holy Roman Emperor could not go further in prayer with a Lutheran heretic like the German Kaiser, who on his part need not measure terms. As early as August 22d the censorship of war news allowed us to learn that "the Kaiser has ordered the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Church throughout Germany to include the following prayer in the liturgy at all public services during the war: "Almighty and merciful God, God of the armies, we beseech in humility for Thy Almighty aid for our Ger-

man fatherland. Bless the entire German war force. Lead us to victory and give us Thy grace that we may show ourselves to be Christians toward our enemies. As well, let us soon arrive at peace which will everlastingly safeguard our free and independent Germany."

This carefully worded supplication must have been instantly rushed to the Throne of Grace, to the Father of Mercies, to Him without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground, and the response might seem to have been instant, for we read that on the 25th the Kaiser wired his daughter-in-law, the Crown Princess:

"I rejoice with thee over the first victory of Wilhelm. God has been on his side and has most brilliantly supported him. To Him be thanks and honor. I remit to Wilhelm the Iron Cross of the second and first class. . . . God protect and succor my boys. Also in the future God be with thee and all wives.

“(Signed)

PAPA WILHELM."

But in some respects this was apparently asking too much. In spite of the flattering recognition of His support of the Crown Prince, He seems to have thought it enough to be only with the Crown Princess "in the future." He evidently could not be bothered to look after "*all* wives," for we read that the wives of unarmed peasants and citizens were driven with their children from their homes in a country which Papa Wilhelm was wasting with fire and sword through a violation of its rights as a neutral nation and of his own word solemnly given, and went wandering beggared through their native land. Other wives were slain at their hearthstones by Papa Wilhelm's artillery, or torn to pieces in their beds by bombs dropped from Papa Wilhelm's dirigibles flying over sleeping towns. So far as "all wives" were concerned, the Helper of the widow and the orphan was not so constant or instant as Papa Wilhelm desired, though Papa Wilhelm had especially commended them to His care. Yet Papa Wilhelm did not lose heart, for in a telegram of the 27th we find him declaring from his headquarters on the Main: "Confidence in the irresistible might of our heroic army and unshakable belief in the help of a living God, together with the consciousness that we are fighting for a worthy cause, should give us faith in an early delivery of Germany from its enemies."

It may be that the Supreme Being, the "living God" as the first of living men here handsomely calls Him, was perhaps not really so very hand-in-glove with the Kaiser. It may be that he did not "brilliantly support" the Crown Prince in battle, and that it was solely "the invincible might of his heroic army" which gave the Kaiser early victory. For Papa Wilhelm had been training them to their work of multiple murder for forty years, incessantly, relentlessly, at the cost of the best years of their youth, of their freedom, of whatever makes life sweet and dear. To perfect the pitiless machine into which he turned a kindly people he spared no means known to the art of the oppressor; he sacrificed to this end truth and honor and the love of men; he substituted the terror of lese-majesty for patriotic loyalty; he made revenge and hate the prime motives of the nation which he welded into an adamant mass to be hurled, when the time came, against another nation which he had schooled them, in the uttermost cruelty of fear, to abhor. In this work he signed promises which trusting nations took for treaties with all the sacred and solemn guarantees, but which his ministers called "scraps of paper" when the convenient time came. He made their commanders the terror of the men, and he perpetuated among the officers of his army the code of the duel; by his will the law of the sword became supreme against the law of the land in any question between soldiers and civilians. He turned the tide of civilization from its flow toward peace and good-will, and drove its stream back among the morasses of the past, where it was choked with the corpses of the immemorial dead; the embers of their homes, and the ruins of their altars, so that when the time came to destroy a peaceful city his soldiers were as ready to do his will as they were to drive the wedge of their bodies through the enemy's lines and to fall in heaps that stayed their advance.

There is no means of telling just yet what the effect of his prayers has been with the Heavenly Father, or whether in the event they will avail against the prayers of the Belgians, the French, the English, and the Russians, beseeching the same God for victory against him. Who, indeed, always excepting the German Emperor, may declare what dwells in the will of the Almighty, or what His purpose is? Will He continue His brilliant support of the Crown Prince, or will He lift up His countenance and make it to

shine upon the peoples who have, humanly speaking, been cruelly outraged in all that is dear to civilized men, whose lands have been overrun by invading armies, whose cities have been burned, whose fields have been laid waste, whose wives and little ones have been driven beggars into the wilderness which wanton invasion has made of their country? At the actual writing it seems as if the Creator of heaven and earth may have thought twice concerning His imperial *protégé*, and ceased to "bless the whole German force." Part of this force is now retracing its bleeding steps, slowly indeed, and perhaps not finally; its retreat may be merely the recoil of the wild beast for another spring upon its prey; but as yet it does not seem so, and humanity may begin to breathe again. No one except the Kaiser may guess at the unfathomable counsels of the Ancient of Days. Yet even the Kaiser may make a mistake, as he seems already to have done; even he may not always interpret aright the designs of the Author of all being, and may misconstrue the secular silence of Him who is from everlasting to everlasting as approval of his violation of the world's peace. Imaginably in the all-knowing, all-pitying Soul of the Universe there may be passing a vision of the world from the time when men began to write the sorrowful history of their race in one another's blood down to the present day, which is not at all the Kaiser's vision of militarized rule. Egypt, Assyria, Persia, with each its long empire, may be as shadows in his sight. Belshazzar, Cyrus, Cambyzes, Alexander, Cæsar, Attila, Omar, Tamerlane, Charlemagne, Cortés, Pizarro, Frederick, Napoleon, all the long, sad tale of the conquerors and destroyers, may trouble the peace of the All-wise and All-merciful as dreams of evil trouble the sleep of mortals. Perhaps the Kaiser himself may be one of these visions; but perhaps Papa Wilhelm may be no more than any commonest father in the sight of the Father of All, though one must shrink from fancying this.

We must still wait the report of the Archangelic censorship, and in the mean time, looking forward to the great final event in which one man may no longer harm the whole world, we may fitly consider the lines, perhaps too sweeping, of a poet, perhaps too Republican, who prophesied—

God said I'm tired of kings,
I suffer them no more.

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.